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Black River Falls School District

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Black River Falls is a small city of about 4,000 people, set in a beautiful valley carved out by glaciers that left behind tall rock formations and a wide river valley. This rural Jackson County community is located between LaCrosse and Eau Claire, just off Interstate 94, a location that has led to a proliferation of medium-sized manufacturing plants and businesses in the service industry. Other major employers in Jackson County are the county itself, Ho Chunk Nation Executive Offices and Casino, and the Jackson County Correctional Institution. The latter two were built in the early 1990s and have added much-needed jobs to the local economy.

The Black River Falls School District is the largest in Jackson County. The district, which has nearly 2,000 students, operates four elementary schools, a middle school, and a four-year high school. The Ho-Chunk Indian Nation is partially located in the district, and children from that community make up 15 percent of the district's enrollment. Thirty-seven percent of the entire student population qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

A spirit of giving and volunteerism permeates the community, particularly with regard to providing for its young people. Volunteers play a prominent role in active programs such as the Boy and Girl Scouts, 4-H, Youth Hockey, and Park and Recreation. Black River Falls has a volunteer community theater in which a number of young people participate. The Garden Club places flowers in planters downtown and on the grounds of the middle and high schools. The Black River Falls Foundation raises funds for projects like the new library and community park and makes funds available for worthwhile community projects. A locally based construction company foundation has generously provided an indoor pool and recreation center to be attached to the new middle school. The same company made a major contribution to other local fundraising for a 44-acre multirecreational community park that opened in the summer of 1998.

This spirit of community collaboration is reflected in the district's mission statement, which reads: "Our interactions with all students will prepare them to be life-long learners and compassionate, contributing members of our society." Black River Falls prevention/wellness programs are actively helping to fulfill this mission by making connections with the community and utilizing the Wisconsin Framework for Comprehensive School Health Programs. The Framework, which places the student at the center, has helped the district widen the scope of its prevention education programming. "It makes the interdependency of the family, the education system and the community very clear," says Marie Marecek, retired Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs (ATOD) coordinator and elementary guidance counselor.

Implementation Strategies

State and Regional Leadership

Direction and support from the Department of Public Instruction and Cooperative Educational Service Agency (CESA) 4 have been instrumental in developing Black River Falls' current health and wellness programming. Staff used the Department of Public Instruction Student Services/Prevention and Wellness Team's Comprehensive AODA Program Checklist in 1988 to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs and develop plans for future action. This eventually led to a district structure around which programs were developed.

As the DPI began to articulate an integrated approach to health and wellness programming, Black River Falls district staff used the Framework to further develop the district's programs. In fact, district staff point to the Framework as a catalyst for local program development. Over the course of several years, as staff and community members indicated their readiness, the district systematically worked on strategies in each of the Framework components. In addition, CESA 4 staff, particularly the ATOD Facilitator/Community Health Educator, helped Black River Falls staff define their vision and determine benchmarks and then provided support as the district implemented its plans.

Funding Support

A variety of grants available through CESA 4 and the DPI have been important in program planning and implementation. They include the following:

Project Validation: The CESA 4 ATOD coordinator was instrumental in writing this multiyear competitive substance abuse grant for federal funds, which expanded and enhanced current prevention efforts in schools and communities in the areas served by CESA 4.

State AODA Program Grants: Since 1988, the year Black River Falls staff identify as a milestone in the development of their current program, the district has been awarded competitive State AODA Program Grant funds to develop their comprehensive school health program. The following brief description of the way this funding has been used provides an overview of this systematic program development in several com-

ponents of the Framework; these programs are discussed in more detail in subsequent sections.

- 1989-90 funds provided the money and spark to get the district's comprehensive school health program organized. The grant helped the district identify where ATOD issues were included in the curriculum, recognize gaps, and plan for greater integration across the curriculum.
- 1991-92 funds initiated a program to enhance parenting skills during which the district trained 71 school and community people in the principles of "Active Parenting." Since then, "Love and Logic" and "Active Parenting 1-2-3-4" have been added.
- 1992-93 funds allowed the district to create an "Expanding Relationships" video and discussion program that was presented to the community. The program featured highlights of a recent survey on local youths' drug and alcohol attitudes and use as well as a summary of ATOD programs, risks, and protective factors. The video program influenced the district to initiate student assistance programs.
- 1994-95 funds provided training and startup costs for a Student Assistance Program.
- 1995-96 funds allowed the district to continue development of its Student Assistance Program, re-energize its parenting programs, and begin to link prevention programs to goals developed in the Black River Falls School District's strategic planning process and staff development plan.
- 1996-1998 funds enabled the district to develop school and family building resiliency programs.

DPI Student Mini-Grants: These grants allowed students from grades 4 to 12 to plan and carry out a variety of prevention/wellness programs. Some programs first conceived as student mini-grants have been repeated yearly in the schools.

Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act: The district has written a consolidated Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) plan that includes Titles I, II, and IV. This requires long-term collaborative planning and has tied the district's wellness and prevention programs to the goals and objectives of its strategic plan. Recently retired ATOD Coordinator Marie Marecek, who has been actively involved in program planning and implementation, strongly believes that this strategy will strengthen prevention/wellness initiatives.

Community Input and Support

Black River Falls staff members realize the value of broad-based involvement in program planning and implementation. Prevention/wellness programs are developed in response to expressed needs (for example, parenting programs and the Expanded Relationships group); community members are included in grant development; and students are included in program planning and implementation. The countywide partnership council, Together for Jackson County Kids, has been a significant vehicle for promoting and collaborating on prevention resources and programming. (Specific district programs and community connections will be discussed in subsequent sections.)

Healthy School Environment

Black River Falls has enlisted parents and the community to provide a healthy school environment for both students and staff. The district's commitment to health and wellness is revealed through its growing and sustainable effort over the past 10 years to pursue new ideas that promote collaborative planning and program implementation.

Today, a substantial number of district staff are trained as facilitators and are active in developing and implementing student programs that promote healthy lifestyles and resilient youth. Parents are involved more than ever in their children's education as they participate in parenting programs and activities that connect homes and schools. "We have a lot of programs that people don't even think of as ATOD," said Wendy Dugan, elementary guidance counselor. "We're strong in sports and clubs. We're trying to get more parents involved, and we're strong in the Student Assistance Program. That all helps in building resiliency and in kids making good decisions."

Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

The Black River Falls health and wellness curriculum uses a combination of information, risk-reduction, and assets-development approaches and integrates them into key subject areas. After evaluating the ATOD curriculum in 1989, district staff developed a matrix of ATOD objectives, which consists of four ATODA competencies, goals for each competency, and objectives for each goal.

These ATOD competencies, which were updated in 1990, 1995, and 1997, are as follows:

ATOD Information:

- use of medicines
- ATOD types and effects (that is, medicines, alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs, steroids, and inhalants)
- continuum of ATOD use
- reasons for ATOD use or non-use
- risk factors and risk-reduction/protections strategies for ATOD-related problems
- family effects of ATOD abuse and dependency
- sources of help for ATOD abuse and dependency

Personal ATOD Competencies (that is, the knowledge/skills needed to assess oneself in relation to ATOD):

- self-concept development
- decision making and goal setting
- risk assessment
- problem solving and stress management

Interpersonal ATOD Competencies (that is, social knowledge/skills and ability to apply them in ATOD-related situations):

- communication skills
- assertiveness and refusal skills
- conflict-resolution and management skills
- relationship skills
- social influences pertaining to family and peers
- knowledge of ATOD regulations (that is, the rules, laws, and codes), consequences, and enforcement systems

Social Systems ATOD Competencies (that is, the knowledge/skills needed to assess the influence of broader social systems on ATOD-related decisions):

- consumer awareness and media influence
- health-care and health-support systems
- regulatory and public policy systems
- social system influences of group identification (that is, culture, gender, and age).

Using ATOD as a point of departure, Black River Falls has expanded its health and wellness curriculum and activities to include other issues such as HIV/AIDS/STDs, resiliency and asset development, violence reduction and safety

instruction, social skills development, nutrition, and development of a healthy lifestyle. Prevention programming is integrated into health, guidance, and human growth and development courses. At the high school level, curriculums in health, family and consumer education, driver's education, social studies, and agriculture include prevention and resiliency information. Peer education and community programs such as DARE and the Black River Memorial Hospital Auxiliary are a significant part of the curriculum and will be discussed in upcoming sections on Student Programs and Family and Community Connections.

The elementary schools have implemented "character education." Each month the schools select a key word such as "trustworthy," "respect," or "responsibility" and incorporate it into the curriculum and outside of the classroom through discussions and activities. The district received a grant from a local foundation to print the words and their definitions on banners that hang outside the schools.

In addition, the district has heightened the importance of prevention health program goals by integrating them into the school's strategic plan. "For prevention and wellness education to succeed, it needs to be integrated into the K-12 curriculum," Marecek said.

Pupil Services

The district employs five full-time guidance counselors (two at the high school, 1.5 at the middle school, and 1.5 at the two elementary schools) as well as a full-time psychologist and school nurse. The district's K-12 counselors and school nurse meet monthly to share information and jointly plan prevention/wellness initiatives. Members of this group plan special schoolwide activities to promote wellness, help teachers schedule related activities, initiate and support parent involvement activities, and assist with providing speakers for classrooms or assemblies that promote prevention/wellness.

Guidance department staff are represented and active on many district and community committees and coalitions. These include district strategic planning, family involvement, building level, curriculum, human growth and development, and cultural diversity committees. At the community level, they are involved in the prevention/wellness coalition, Together for Jackson County Kids, and Family Preservation and Support. Through in-

volvement with many groups working on youth issues, pupil services staff believe they can help achieve the Framework goal of fostering healthy, resilient, and successful learners.

Student Programs

The district has demonstrated a strong commitment to an environment that inspires active student participation and involvement in programs that promote health and wellness. Excellence in Black River Falls' student programs was recently recognized by the DPI.

About 60 academic, athletic, and music extracurricular activities are offered in grades six through 12, and student councils are active at both the middle and high school levels. The overall rate for student participation was 85 percent when last measured in 1995-96. These extracurricular activities play an important role in prevention in that students are offered opportunities to form ties with adults working with the groups, to gain insight into their personal assets and abilities, and to develop their role as participating community members.

Red Ribbon Week, Wellness Day, Hospital Auxiliary programs, youth mini-grant projects, and peer educator programs add dimension to the wellness curriculum. The Red Ribbon Week features prevention/wellness activities in classrooms and buildings; Hospital Auxiliary prevention programs are presented in classrooms, and students wear ribbons and bracelets with drug-free messages. In the community, Together for Jackson County Kids distributes red ribbons, and the weekly newspaper provides generous coverage.

Other currently active student programs are briefly described below.

Peer Educators

The Peer Educator program, also recognized by the DPI as exemplary, has been active for the past 15 years. The program has grown from 13 students to about 100, with many of its activities supported by DPI Student Mini-Grants. Trained high school students participate as peer educators in the elementary schools. Peer Refusal Skills, Anti-Smoking, Conflict Management, Magic Potion Play, and Happy Hill Farm are popular Peer Educator programs. High school students bring elementary pupils anti-drug messages through role-playing, demonstrations, plays, and puppet

shows. Peer Educators also present HIV/AIDS information as a part of Teen AIDS Peer Prevention to BRF Middle School students. During Spirit Day, a relatively new youth program, trained high school cheerleaders and dance team members help students in grades 1-3 develop self-esteem.

Student Assistance Program

The Student Assistance Program (SAP) aims to provide assistance services to students for alcohol, tobacco, and other drug-related problems with which they or a family member might be involved. Both academically and socially, these students are at a disadvantage. The Black River Falls School District recognizes that such problems do plague students and that, as a community of responsible educators and support staff, it must do what it can to help young people with problems that could impede their success in school. The SAP offers small support groups for students who want to stay clean and sober or for students who are affected by a loved one's alcoholism or other drug addiction. Trained members facilitate these small groups. (See the subsequent section on Adult Programs for more detail on this training.)

All schools have one SAP contact person who is aided by a small stipend from Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act funds. Schools, like students, have unique situations and leaders. CORE groups, as they are called, are active in all elementary schools and vary from many sessions each year in a very small school, coordinated by a trained secretary, to twice yearly sets of sessions to noon-hour chat sessions. In 1995, middle school support groups were active, and high school groups appeared to be diminishing. By 1997-98 both middle school and high school programs were struggling, and the high school saw a great need to re-energize. Three high school staff members and the school district nurse attended the National Student Assistance Conference in March 1998 and returned with renewed enthusiasm for re-establishing the SAP at the middle and high school levels. Thus, the focus of the district's 1998-99 State AOD Program Grant is to strengthen health promotion, positive youth development, and prevention of risky behaviors among students at the middle and high school levels. This will be done through a revitalized Student Assistance Program concentrating on prevention and intervention.

Adult Programs

Black River Falls provides a variety of learning opportunities for staff and other adults as it supports students in becoming healthy and resilient. Some examples of prevention and wellness-related activities are listed below.

Staff Development

- Family involvement inservice organized, funded jointly by ATOD and Title I
- Conflict mediation training organized, funded jointly with Cooperative Educational Service Agency (CESA) 4
- Student Assistance Programs School and Community Inservice held, funded jointly with CESA 4 and Project Validation
- Love and Logic, a monthly late-start inservice held for teachers
- Stress Management, a college credit course, made available to staff.

Student Assistance Program Training

Core Training: A total of 68 teachers as well as other staff and community people have received Core training by nationally known trainers, Gary Anderson and Orville Dean. Core training instructs participants about alcohol and other drugs and their physical, mental, and psychological effects on people. The training also describes ways that students' use of ATOD or use by others close to them can affect their learning and progress in school. This training was made possible by joint funding with CESA 4 Project Validation.

Facilitator Training: This training for teachers, other staff, and community people equips participants with the knowledge and skills to organize and facilitate short-term student support groups for young people whose social and emotional needs are interfering with their ability to be resilient and successful learners.

Parent to Parent Network

The Parent to Parent Network, jointly facilitated by parents and school staff, meets monthly to listen to local speakers on topics of special interest (for example, adolescent depression) and to discuss common concerns. The network distributes a list of local "Safe Homes" and was instrumental in obtaining a Police Liaison Officer for the district. The Parent to Parent Network is plan-

ning a Teen Parenting Fair in late 1998. Eight parents recently attended the national "Parent-hood in America Conference."

Family and Community Connections

Staff report that family and community connections are an area of strength for the district. As each component of the Framework was developed through competitive State AOD Program Grants and Federal Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act entitlements, the district involved community residents including parents. Through the grants, the district has encouraged and funded community and parent participation in parent training, CORE and facilitator training, and all other prevention training. A brief summary of the Jackson County Partnership Council (which serves as the district's ATOD advisory council), parenting programs, and the districts collaboration with other community groups follows.

Together for Jackson County Kids

This countywide partnership council has met regularly since 1988 to promote, coordinate, and share alcohol and other drug prevention programming and resources. Together for Jackson County Kids includes interested parents and other individuals, churches, and the school districts of Black River Falls, Blair-Taylor, Melrose-Mindoro, and Alma Center-Humbird-Merrillan. Other members include representatives from the sheriff's department, city police department, human services department, CESA 4, Ho Chunk Nation, University Extension-Jackson County, and local outpatient clinic providers.

Prior to 1994, Black River Falls had a Safe and Drug Free School advisory committee that met several times each year. The same district staff and others were attending meetings of both the advisory committee and county partnership, discussing the same issues. In 1994, it became apparent that it would be more efficient to use the countywide partnership council as an advisory group, which is the current arrangement.

Parenting Programs

The Parenting Program in Black River Falls evolved from needs expressed by the community, including parents, the school board, and Together

For Jackson County Kids. The need was first identified several years ago when the district used the DPI Comprehensive ATOD Checklist to evaluate its programs. The goal of the Parenting Program is to help children by strengthening families. Interactive video parenting sessions, a parenting library, and a Parent-to-Parent Network were chosen as ways to reach that goal. Some highlights of the program are delineated chronologically below:

1991: "Active Parenting" was chosen for the interactive video sessions. The program focuses on instilling courage and self-esteem in children, developing responsibility, and gaining cooperation through effective parent-child communication. The teen program also addresses the challenge of alcohol and other drugs as well as teen sexuality. More than 70 people from the school and community were trained in "Active Parenting Basic" or "Active Parenting of Teens." Many of those trained were willing to conduct the six-session parenting groups. Others were knowledgeable about the program and willing to promote it. These trained facilitators conducted between four and eight "Active Parenting" groups yearly until 1994.

1992: parent volunteers initiated a parenting shelf at the public library. Grant funds since that time have expanded the shelf to include more than 100 books on permanent loan for use by parents, teachers, and community. Lists of these books are distributed at all parenting classes, at parent/teacher conferences, and to local mental health providers. Parenting pamphlet centers, funded jointly by the district and grants, have been set up in all elementary schools.

1994-95: parenting groups went through a transition. A refresher course for "Active Parenting" was held; at the same time, the school psychologist, who had recently taken training in the "Love and Logic" parenting program, presented this information. The group attending the training decided to offer both programs to parents. After a year, all Parenting Programs followed the "Love and Logic" format even as "Active Parenting" for 1-4 year olds was added.

Staff persons who work with Parenting Programs are also a part of the district's Family/School Involvement Strategic Plan Committee designed to help ensure collaboration and communication with other district programs.

Other Community Connections

Ho Chunk Nation: The Ho Chunk Nation is an active partner with the Black River Falls district. Ho Chunk family-services providers participated in the parenting program, first to learn about the parent-training approach and then to adapt it to traditional Ho Chunk child rearing practices. As adapted, the program builds on Native American values and experiences of parenting. Furthermore, the district has discovered that parenting programs for Ho Chunk parents are more successful when conducted in the Ho Chunk community called "The Mission." Plans are being made to conduct a "Love and Logic" group and to prepare a Ho Chunk mental health worker to present "Active Parenting" for 1-4 year olds.

Expanding Relationships Group: A parent already involved in the district parent education program enlisted other parents to help with the ATOD program. This group inspired the school district's grant project, "Expanding Relationships." The Expanding Relationships group prepared a locally developed video/discussion program exploring ideas to combat alcohol and drug abuse among community youth. It featured local youth and adults talking about risk and protective factors in Jackson County. Named a DPI exemplary program, it involved numerous parent and community volunteers in a variety of roles, including videotaping, editing, marketing, scheduling, and presenting to school and community groups. The video was presented to 34 groups (over 800 people) and was followed by discussion of the question, "How can you in your daily life or as part of organizations or workplaces help to decrease youth alcohol and drug use and promote healthy lifestyles for all?" The video is still used in a program for parents of young people who are before the courts for underage use of alcohol.

DARE: Since 1990, the Jackson County Sheriff's Department has presented the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) program to second, fourth, fifth and seventh graders in all Jackson County schools. The program is highly regarded in the county and is jointly funded by the county and DPI grants, with various schools serving as fiscal agents. A DARE-trained uniformed law enforcement officer presents lessons in which topics such as how to say "no" to peers, building self-esteem, assertiveness, social influences involved in the use of drugs, and positive alternatives to drug use are covered. The Black River Falls elemen-

tary guidance program integrates DARE objectives with guidance curriculum objectives.

Black River Memorial Hospital Auxiliary Programs: For the past 15 years, the Black River Memorial Hospital Auxiliary has trained high school students to present anti-smoking programs to fourth graders. Auxiliary members also present a poison prevention program and a grade four anti-drug puppet presentation called "The Truly Me Club." Finally, the Auxiliary has been a partner for the past 12 years in "On My Own," a program to teach third graders responsibility and protective self-help skills for use during short periods of time when they are left to care for themselves. This program also has a parent component.

Future Directions

In the future, the Black River Falls School District will align itself with the five themes developed at the Summit on the State of Prevention in Wisconsin in February 1998.

Youth Empowerment: Youth must be provided with opportunities to lead. They must be provided with skills to influence and support their peers. They should be sought out to provide service to their communities and direction on policy and program development. They should be recognized, valued, and involved in an equitable manner.

Funding: The district will provide consistent, long-term financial resources for primary prevention efforts.

Communication and Collaboration: The district must promote and enhance opportunities for networking within and across disciplines and systems working in prevention.

Education: Education for prevention must be a seamless system that provides skills, information, and motivation for all citizens. Education is a life-long commitment.

Policy: Current and proposed legislation must be consistent with the stated goals of creating safe and healthy children, families, and communities.

From among the five themes, the School District of Black River Falls will focus on youth empowerment, communication and collaboration, and education. For the foreseeable future, the district will work to emphasize the Student Assistance Program at the middle and high school levels through increasing staff training and offering a greater variety of student support groups.